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ABSTRACT

The subjects of this study were 165 teachers who participated in peer assistance workshops conducted by peer teachers recognized for their successful teaching. These teachers shared ideas on: (1) classroom/behavior management; (2) organizing instruction; (3) teaching methods for specific content; and (4) student evaluation and reporting. Questionnaires administered to the classroom teachers who participated in these workshops asked them to indicate which ideas in each of these four categories they would implement. In the fall, as school started, follow-up interviews were held at school sites with a sample of the workshop participants to determine implementation success. Results of the study indicated that peer assistance workshops were very productive. The majority of participants indicated that they expected to use some of the idea presented in the summer workshops. Ideas for improving classroom or behavior management were most popular, followed by teaching methods and time management ideas for paper grading and reporting. On-site interviews with teachers in the fall revealed a very high degree of implementation. (JD)

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Teacher Preference for Peer Assistance
Inservice Education

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Most teachers seek ideas to improve the teaching and learning in their classrooms. Frequently though, they overlook one of their best sources of ideas, their own peers (Santora, 1988). In addition, many expert teachers have little opportunity to share their successful practices and ideas with other teachers. They are rarely invited to officially present them in the context of inservice activities. Instead of these successful teachers being used as a resource in inservice activities, consultants for inservice workshops and other staff development activities are often recruited from the ranks of university faculties or from the growing pool of professional consultants. While a number of these consultants are highly qualified theoreticians, some have limited practical experience in the classroom, and many have little knowledge of local school conditions (Busching and Rowls, 1988).

Inservice education workshops in which successful teachers share "what works for me" with their peers have received a positive endorsement from participants. These teacher-to teacher workshops bring together peers in the same discipline, or on the same grade level, to discuss problems with a successful teacher who has encountered and solved those same problems. Ideas presented are practical ones that have been validated in a classroom similar to those of the workshop participants. Such idea sharing with a credible person in ones own profession has been shown to be a productive means of professional development (Crandall, 1983).

This study was designed to assess the productivity and effectiveness of teacher-to-teacher inservice workshops. Specifically, the study attempted to answer three questions: 1) were ideas presented in the workshops taken back to the classroom and implemented 2) how successful was the implementation of workshop ideas and 3) in

what ways do workshops led by peer teachers differ from workshops led by other type of consultants?

Method

Subjects

The subjects for this study were 165 teachers who participated in peer assistance workshops sponsored by a regional Inservice Education Center. These workshops, conducted by peer teachers recognized for their successful teaching, were conducted for kindergarten, first, second, upper elementary, and junior and senior high teachers.

Instruments

A questionnaire was developed by the investigators to assess workshop participant response to ideas presented in the workshops in four categories: 1) classroom/behavior management 2) organizing instruction, 3) teaching: content and method, and 4) student evaluation/reporting. Participants were asked to indicate whether they would definitely implement an idea, would probably implement an idea, or whether they would not implement an idea (idea already implemented, not applicable, or not substantively discussed in the workshop).

Interview questions were also developed by Center staff to use in follow-up visits to 15 randomly selected teachers. These questions solicited specific information about ideas that were implemented in the classroom and how effective the implemented ideas were. Questions were also posed concerning the value of peer-assistance inservice and the ways it differed from inservice activities that used other types of workshop consultants.

Procedures

Teachers who had been recognized as successful in the classroom (award-winning teachers) were recruited to lead summer workshops for their same-grade peers in which they would share "what works for me". They shared ideas in 1) classroom/behavior management, 2) organizing instruction, 3) teaching methods for specific content, and 4) student evaluation and reporting. Questionnaires were administered to the classroom teachers who participated in these workshops. They were asked to indicate which ideas in each of the four categories (classroom/behavior management; organizing instruction; teaching: content and method; and student evaluation and reporting) they would implement. In the fall after school started, follow-up interviews were held at school sites with a sample of the workshop participants to determine implementation success.

Data Collection

The questionnaires were administered to all participants at the conclusion of the workshops by the investigators. Interviews were also conducted by the investigators.

Data Analysis

Frequencies and percentages of response were computed on all questionnaire items. Some grade-level comparisons were made using the chi square statistic with Yate's correction for continuity applied for small expected frequencies. The criterion for significance was set at .05.

Results

Questionnaires

Demographic characteristics of the workshop participants revealed that 67% of them were kindergarten, first, and second grade teachers. Veteran teachers were in greater attendance than beginning teachers, with 72% of the participants indicating that

they had been teaching for 10 years or more. Almost 63% had attended at least four prior workshops sponsored by the Inservice Center. These characteristics are shown in Table 1.

Insert Table 1 about here

Among the ideas discussed at the workshops, those pertaining to classroom/behavior management received the highest intend-to-implement response from participating teachers. Over half of the participants (59.7%) indicated that they would definitely implement motivational strategies presented in the workshop, and 50% indicated they would definitely implement discipline techniques and methods for reinforcing appropriate behavior. Intend-to-use response to the ideas presented for classroom/behavior management are presented in Table 2.

Insert Table 2 about here

Table 3 shows workshop participants' intention to implement ideas for teaching. Ideas for the use of learning centers received the highest intend-to-use response from teachers (38.9%) followed by ideas for writing instruction (25%) and ideas for instructional materials (23.6%). Ideas concerning the subject matter per se apparently received little attention, with less than 10% indicating plans to use ideas on subject matter update.

Insert Table 3 about here

Participant response to ideas for organizing instruction is shown in Table 4. Ideas for organizing for more time-on-task received the highest intend-to-use response (30.6) followed by ideas for group instruction (29.2%) and ideas for independent activities (25%).

Insert Table 4 about here

One third of the workshop participants indicated they planned to use ideas for time management in paper grading and reporting. Participant response to other ideas for student evaluation and reporting is presented in Table 5.

Insert Table 5 about here

Interviews

Implementation of classroom/behavior management ideas. Interviews with teacher participants revealed that a number of the ideas concerning classroom/behavior management that were presented at the workshops were implemented at the beginning of the school year. All of the kindergarten and first grade teachers who were interviewed (N=5) indicated that they were using some form of the conduct cards presented at the summer workshops to reinforce appropriate behavior. The cards, used to record summary comments about conduct, provide a visual display about the

consequences of behavior (token rewards for good behavior, the absence of tokens for inappropriate behavior) and also provide the teacher with a record for periodic reporting to parents. A bean jar (or marble jar) was being used by four of the five teachers. Beans or marbles were added to a jar when good behavior occurred and a treat of some type was provided when the jar was filled. Two of the first grade teachers interviewed expressed success with conduct rule charts which stressed appropriate behavior. Talking chairs for two students having a dispute were reported to be successful by one of the first grade teachers as an aid in maintaining discipline.

Second grade teachers were also using conduct rule charts with success. The three second grade teachers interviewed were all using the charts which stressed rules and consequences of behavior. Talking chairs were being used by two of the second grade teachers, as were restroom passes.

Teachers in the upper elementary grades and middle school grades (N=7) were using a number of verbal motivational techniques and verbal reinforcement of appropriate behavior. Because student tardiness can be a problem in the departmentalized format of the upper grades, a technique to reduce tardiness by having the tardy student write a one page essay explaining his or her tardiness was implemented. This technique, discussed in the summer workshops, was found to be successful by the three teachers who had used it.

Implementation of teaching ideas. All of the kindergarten and first grade teachers interviewed were using a number of ideas provided at the workshops for teaching letter, number, and word recognition. Games, vowel family puppets, calendars, numbered puzzle segments were some of the techniques being used. Each of the

teachers expressed satisfactory results with the use of these techniques.

A number of ideas concerned with learning centers were being used by the second grade teachers interviewed. Paper bag puppets were also being used for the development of communication skills by one of the second grade teachers.

Teachers in the upper grades reported a number of ideas in use for teaching language arts and writing: verbal book reports using a bag of objects relevant to the story, creative writing with animal crackers, and modified journal writing. Ideas being implemented for the teaching of mathematics were the creation of straw models in geometry, the use of a place value chart where the decimal is a football, and extended use of calculators after mastery of facts and concepts.

Implementation of ideas for organizing instruction. The most popular idea received from the summer workshops for organizing instruction was the use of colored folders. These were being used to create categories and priorities for student work (e.g. Today's Work, Work to Take Home, Special Work). Each of the kindergarten and first grade teachers were using some form of this idea. Ideas were also being used to organize the rotation of students through learning centers to provide for more time on task. One second grade teacher was implementing an idea for having students grade some of their own work. Success was reported with each of these ideas.

One seventh grade teacher had implemented an idea to provide more time on task: she gave a competitive exercise in problem solving to students as they came into the room and during roll call. She reported great success with the use of this sometimes-nonproductive time.

Implementation of ideas for evaluation and reporting. The teachers who were using the conduct cards reported their use in making progress reports to parents on student behavior. The use of colored folders (to organize and categorize student work) was reported to be a time management technique in paper grading and reporting. Two first grade teachers also reported the successful use of an idea to write periodic newsletters to communicate with parents. Two upper elementary teachers reported they had used an idea on grading student writing by looking for just one type of error as an aid to time management in paper grading.

Perception of success of teacher-to-teacher inservice.

Perhaps the most informative data came from questions dealing with the merits of peer assistance inservice rather than inservice experiences with a consultant or "expert" who is not a practitioner. All teachers questioned expressed their conviction that peer assistance is particularly effective for a number of reasons. Participants responded to criteria for effectiveness by rating the workshops from 1 (low) to 5 (high). Table 6 shows the results of those ratings.

Insert Table 6 about here

Participants were also asked to respond to two open-ended questions concerning the unique qualities of these workshops. One question asked what characteristics peer teachers exhibit that are different from other types of workshop consultants (such as university personnel or education "experts"). Responses indicated that peer teachers are perceived as more credible because of their classroom experience: "They really know

what works"; "They are more in tune with classroom problems"; "They have first hand experiences like mine". They are also perceived as providing more useful, practical, and creative ideas for participants to take back to their classrooms to use. Some responses were: "Peers offer practical, usable, tried and true ideas"; "Peers have more creative ideas to share"; "Ideas of peers are directly applicable to my own grade levels"; "Peers are realistic". Another major quality of peer teachers was their ability to make teacher feel relaxed, unintimidated, and free to express ideas and concerns. specific qualities mentioned were: "is less threatening", "has a personal interest in me", "wants to exchange ideas", and "is more empathetic". Table 7 shows these results.

Insert Table 7 about here

Participants were also asked in what ways the peer assistance workshops were different from other workshops. Responses indicated that there was more involvement of the participating teachers, that the atmosphere was more relaxing and more conducive to an exchange of ideas, and that the ideas discussed where more directly applicable to the participants' classrooms. Table 8 reports these results.

Insert Table 8 about here

However, some teachers who responded to these questions also felt that inservice provided by consultants who were not peer teachers provided some advantages not always available in peer-assistance inservice. They felt that a new perspective can be

gained by listening to someone whose environment is more theoretical than practical or by someone that is somewhat removed from the daily problems of the classroom. Some felt that a balance between the two types of inservice is generally most helpful.

Conclusions

The results of this study indicated that peer assistance workshops were very productive. The majority of the participating teachers indicated that they expected to use some of the ideas presented in the summer workshops. Ideas for improving classroom or behavior management were most popular, followed by teaching methods, and time management ideas for paper grading and reporting.

Data collected by on-site interviews in teachers' classrooms after school had started in the fall revealed that there was a very high degree of idea implementation: fourteen of the fifteen teachers interviewed could produce evidence of successful implementation of one or more of the ideas provided them in the summer workshops. In most cases, there was convincing evidence of a number of ideas being successfully implemented.

Teacher participants also reported a preference for peer assistance workshops. A number of reasons were expressed for this preference: peer teachers provide practical ideas that can be implemented in the classroom; the workshops conducted for the exchange of ideas, peer teachers have experience-based credibility, and the teacher-consultant has a working knowledge of the problems and concerns of the participating teachers. The majority of teachers questioned expressed a preference for peer teacher consultant rather than university consultants or educational "experts".

Additionally, there was residual enthusiasm for the workshops. A common

comment was, "I hope we can have more of those workshops." In general, these workshops seemed to provide an environment of collaboration and fellowship from which participating teachers took workable ideas and the confidence to implement those ideas.

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Table 1
 Characteristics of Workshop Participants

Characteristic	N	%
Grade Taught		
K	26	15.8
1	30	18.2
2	39	23.6
3-4	17	10.3
5-6	10	6.1
7-9	35	21.2
Years as a Teacher		
4 or less	27	16.4
5-9	29	17.6
10-14	38	23.0
15-19	32	19.4
20-24	28	16.9
24 or more	11	6.7
Inservice Workshops Attended		
3 or less	67	40.6
4-6	34	20.6
7-9	22	13.3
10-12	29	17.6
More than 12	13	7.9

Table 2
Workshop Participant Reaction to Ideas for
Classroom/Behavior Management
(N=165)

Idea Topic	% Participant Reaction*		
	1	2	3
Motivational strategies	59.7	20.8	19.5
Discipline techniques	50.0	29.2	20.8
Reinforcing appropriate behavior	50.0	16.7	33.3
Communicating positive expectations	38.9	15.3	45.9
Preventing discipline problems	37.5	22.2	40.3
Rule setting	37.5	11.1	51.4
Improving students attitudes	36.1	29.2	34.7
Improving teacher/student relationships	20.8	15.3	63.9
Getting and holding attention	15.3	15.3	69.5
Organizing the physical environment	13.9	19.4	66.7
Handling transition time (between activities)	11.1	9.7	79.2

* 1 = will definitely try in my class

2 = will probably try in my class

3 = ideas were not new, not applicable, or not discussed

Table 3
Workshop Participant Reaction to Ideas for
Teaching: Content and Method
(N=165)

Idea Topic	<u>% Participant Reaction*</u>		
	1	2	3
Learning centers	38.9	36.1	25.0
Writing instruction	25.0	22.2	58.3
Instructional materials	23.6	13.9	62.5
Reading instruction	19.4	22.2	58.3
Seat work	15.3	19.4	65.3
Critical thinking/problem solving strategies	12.5	12.5	75.0
Questioning techniques	11.1	12.5	76.4
Subject matter update	9.7	13.9	76.5
Field trip selection/preparation	9.7	2.8	87.5

* 1 = will definitely try in my class

2 = will probably try in my class

3 = ideas were not new, not applicable, or not discussed

Table 4
Workshop Participant Reaction to Ideas for
Organizing Instruction
(N=165)

Idea Topic	<u>% Participant Reaction*</u>		
	1	2	3
Organizing for more time-on-task	30.6	19.4	50.0
Group instruction	29.2	22.2	48.6
Independent activities	25.0	16.7	58.3
Individualized instruction	20.8	13.9	65.3
Lesson planning	15.3	9.7	75.1
Arranging some academic success for every student	11.1	15.3	73.6
Peer tutoring	8.3	9.7	82.0
Ability grouping	8.3	9.7	82.0
Working with mainstreamed students	4.2	6.9	88.9
Teaching heterogeneous classes (accommodating student differences)	4.2	6.9	88.9

* 1 = will definitely try in my class

2 = will probably try in my class

3 = ideas were not new, not applicable, or not discussed

Table 5
Workshop Participant Reaction to Ideas for
Evaluation/Reporting
(N=165)

Idea Topic	% Participant Reaction*		
	1	2	3
Time management in paper grading and reporting	33.3	20.8	45.8
Parent conference	18.1	18.1	63.8
Evaluating student performances (constructing tests, assigning grades)	13.9	11.1	75.0
Preparing students to take standardized tests	4.2	1.4	94.5

* 1 = will definitely try in my class

2 = will probably try in my class

3 = ideas were not new, not applicable, or not discussed

Table 6
Workshop Ratings

<u>Criteria</u>	<u>Mean</u>	<u>SD</u>
Useful	4.60	.81
Practical	4.63	.77
Interesting	4.58	.79
Credible	4.59	.78
Involved Participants	4.43	.90

Table 7
Responses:

What qualities do peer teacher consultants exhibit that are different from other types of workshop consultants (such as university personnel or educational "experts")?

Qualities	%
Experience/Relate to Classroom	51
Useful and Creative Ideas	19
Relaxed Atmosphere/Freedom to Express	15

Table 8
Responses:

How was this workshop different from other workshops?

Reply	%
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Teacher Involvement	23
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Relaxed Atmosphere/Freedom to Express	18
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Applicable Activities for Classroom	13
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Different Philosophies Shared	8
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